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ABSTRACT

An action research project set out to increase students' writing fluency and investigate whether writing fluency varies as a function of writing prompts and directions given to students. Subjects were 62 students in a first-grade class, a second-grade class, and a fifth/sixth-grade Special Day class (all in this class are learning disabled) in a school in Newport Beach, California. To motivate students, three types of writing prompts, iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book), were used to elicit increased writing fluency. Subjects were first asked to describe the prompts and then were asked to predict what would happen next. Writing samples were collected once a month for 5 months. Students' writing fluency was tabulated by counting the total number of words written after the presentation of each writing prompt. Results indicated that (1) the literature book prompt produced the greatest number of words written, and the mean number of words written for the other two prompts were not statistically significantly different; and (2) the direction to describe the prompt produced more words written than the direction to predict. Further research needs to explore both writing prompts and teacher directions in more detail. (Contains 64 references and 1 table of data. The writing prompts and several photographs are attached.) (RS)

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ED 398 991

# THE EFFECTS OF STIMULUS WRITING MODALITY TO PRODUCE WRITING FLUENCY IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

A Project Submitted in Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COLLEGE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The Newport-Mesa School Renewal Cadre, lead by Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun, prompted an investigation of writing strategies used in the classroom. Teachers often struggle with the problem of how to get children to write more (Clay 1985). The objective of this study was to determine which type of writing prompt and direction will elicit the most fluency in our students' writing. To meet this objective a research plan was developed to examine the effects of different writing prompts and instruction. This study will help further current professional research in the use of prompts to increase writing fluency.

Action Research was chosen as a means of collecting data, diagnosing a problem, and searching for a solution. This type of research is, "A fancy way of saying let's study what's happening at our school and decide how to make it a better place." (Calhoun pg. 1, 1993). Having identified the problem as the lack of student writing fluency, data was accumulated and studied within the bounds of action research. To motivate students, three types of writing prompts; iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book), were utilized to elicit increased written fluency. Over a five month period the effects of three types of writing prompts were measured. Writing samples were collected

once a month from September through January. The students' writing fluency was tabulated by counting the total number of words written after the presentation of each writing prompt.

The students were presented with three types of writing prompts: a literature book, a video clip, and a picture. After each prompt was presented, the students were asked to complete two tasks. The students were first asked to describe (tell about) the prompts. Then, they were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen next. Increases in student writing fluency were tabulated by counting the number of words written and statistically measured using analysis of variance to determine which writing prompt produced the greatest written fluency being defined as a measure of quantity not quality.

# CHAPTER II

# THE PROBLEM

## Significance of the Study

Writing is an essential part of a successful school curriculum. However, it appears that American school children are not learning the skills necessary to become proficient writers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1987) states that students are performing below national expectations in skills which involve the thinking and organization of written thoughts. In response to the general writing prompt activities 26% of the fourth grade and 19% of the eighth grade students were unable to focus and write on a single topic. The fourth grade prompt asked students to "write a scary story about this room" (Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann & Kennedy, pg. 24, 1995). The eighth grade prompts asked students to "describe yourself and your future." Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann and Kennedy's 1995 report concluded that the prompts did not make explicit expectations or establish a purpose for the students' writing (Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann & Kennedy 1995). Therefore, it appears that American children need instruction involving more writing practice and tasks that require in-depth thinking skills. Writing fluency in the primary grades (first through third) should serve as a building block for the thinking and writing necessary in the upper grades (fourth through sixth). The lack of a writing fluency foundation has impeded

higher levels of writing competency in the upper grades (N.A.E.P. Report 1994). The National Assessment of Educational Progress study suggests that students need more broad based experiences in which writing tasks are integrated with their work throughout the curriculum.

In the past, few research studies have investigated strategies which prompt students to write fluently. The product approach to writing of the 1970's equipped students with a writing strategy which placed great emphasis on the mechanics and form of writing. As a result, students did not learn how to use their own ideas in a meaningful context for writing (Parson 1985; Hillocks 1984). Students were taught form and correctness with skills being separated into sub skills (Gray 1982). The product approach to writing concentrated on the final product as students were instructed to complete a "one-shot" written piece (Parsons 1985). The writing prompts were used to evaluate or test knowledge studied. Prompts were not intended to elicit a meaningful expression of ideas but to assess student writing and evaluate the students' knowledge (R. D. Walshe 1987). Students did not write fluently under this approach because meaningful ideas were deemphasized in favor of grammar and mechanics. Furthermore, students did not take risks in writing as they were afraid to make a mistake (Cotton 1988).

Writing instruction shifted from a product approach to a

process approach in the late 1970's. Students were involved in several stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publication (Parson 1985; Hillocks 1986). During this time students participated more in the writing experience with a greater emphasis being placed on the writer. Teachers used prompts to help their students generate ideas and to provide a background and purpose for writing (Applebee 1986). Students wrote more freely with the process approach but their fluency was inhibited by the many stages of writing and rewriting. Furthermore, this approach did not provide prompts which were powerful enough to elicit higher level thinking (Applebee 1986). After evaluating its effectiveness, the process approach to writing instruction has been found to be ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Langer, Applebee 1987).

Presently, the arrival of the whole language movement has encouraged students to write about meaningful and personally relevant topics (Raphael 1994). In this approach, writing has meaning for the author and the audience following the process of professional writers. Teachers instruct students to practice new skills and accept their approximations as a sign of growth rather than a mistake (Clay 1982). Many types of prompts are used to activate prior student knowledge and motivate meaningful written responses (Pritchard 1993). Field trips, video tapes, science experiments, art lessons, and literature are examples of prompts

which may be incorporated into the classroom curriculum to encourage writing fluency. The whole language approach allows students to write freely to express their thoughts and ideas. Teachers provide prompts which encourage students to organize their thoughts and evaluate information. Prompts give teachers ways to strengthen their writing program (Chan 1995). Unfortunately, the whole language approach does not utilize specific prompts to increase written fluency because the quality of prompts elicits very different responses among students (Chan 1995).

In reviewing the past approaches to writing instruction, it is evident that there is a need to develop different oral directional strategies that will increase the students' ability to write with greater fluency. The effects of instruction utilizing different writing prompts were analyzed in an Action Research framework. Three types of writing prompts, literature books, silent video clips, and pictures, were presented in an effort to elicit more fluency in student writing.

Research Question

Does student writing fluency vary as a function of writing prompt and direction?

Research Hypotheses

Students will demonstrate a measurable difference in writing fluency through the use of three different writing prompts and two

writing directions.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no measurable difference in fluency in student writing using three different writing prompts and two writing directions.

Definition of Terms

1. Action Research is defined as the process of collecting data about an ongoing system with the purpose of improving practice (Calhoun 1993).

2. Writing Prompt is defined as a motivational tool such as, a topic, situation, stimulus, or assignment used to elicit a response in expository writing.

3. Fluency is defined as the quantity of words in an expository writing selection.

Summary

The inability of researchers and teachers to identify effective writing prompts to elicit greater writing fluency in primary students inspired this research study. The writing process within the classroom setting was explored to discern which type of writing prompt and direction would have the greatest impact on fluency.

# Chapter III

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Furthering the growth of student writing is crucial to the development of communication skills which are used in all areas of the curriculum placing this ability at the forefront of educational concern, research and debate. Prompts have been used in writing instruction during the past twenty-five years to activate student knowledge and focus student thinking. It is important for teachers through the use of field testing to improve and refine the writing prompts used in their classrooms (The California Writing Project 1987). This literature review on the subject of improving writing fluency in the primary grades includes a review of the following instructional strategies: The Product Approach; The Process Approach; and the Whole Language Approach.

### Overview of The Product Approach

The traditional Product Approach taught form and correctness in writing (Parson, Millocks 1984). A perfect copy was expected so children learned that it was wrong to make mistakes. Fluency can not come without mistakes, and perfection has no room for mistakes (Clay 1982).

In the Product Approach teachers provided drill work on specific skills. Teachers also controlled many of the writing decisions for the students in terms of topic, form and length

(Parson 1985). Learning involved adhering to writing rules and mastery of formal conventions and models (Gray 1960, Young 1983). Using the Product Approach, students' writing fluency was impeded as the objective was to 'get it right' the first time because this was the only version turned in. Too much emphasis was placed on the form and mechanics of writing and as a result, students did not learn to use their ideas in a meaningful written context (Parsons 1985).

In the Product Approach, writing prompts were used as a tool to evaluate student writing skills in terms of grammar and punctuation. A writing prompt was used to elicit the mechanics of writing and was not intended to extract a meaningful expression of ideas. Hillocks (1987) and Parsons (1985) revealed that the Product Approach to writing is ineffective because too much emphasis was placed on the mechanics of writing. Students did not learn how to link the perfect model with fluency in applying their ideas to writing. In conclusion, Hillocks (1987) research demonstrates that the knowledge of grammatical rules alone do not improve one's writing. The sum of the parts does not necessarily equal the whole product in writing.

Overview of the Process Approach

As students in the primary grades begin to develop control over their written language the goal of instruction is the development of fluency in writing (California Writing Project

1987). In the 1970's and 1980's a major change in the approach to writing took place. Instead of the attention being focused on the final written product, there was a renewed interest in the process approach to the teaching of writing (Applebee 1987). The Process Approach emphasized an author's writing stages as opposed to focusing on the final product in terms of grammar and spelling.

Instructional strategies were designed to help the students organize ideas before writing and revise their initial drafts. The activities associated with the Process Approach include prewriting, sharing/responding, revising, editing, and publication (Graves 1983, Hillocks 1987, Applebee 1987, Langer 1987). Researchers tried to follow the stages of writing authors use and translate their actions into instructional methods for the classroom. Furthermore, the researchers also began to shift their theoretical views of writing to go beyond skills. Thus, the Process Approach helped students construct the thinking process and give meaning to their written discourse with the writer's purpose being the communication of ideas (Englert, Raphael & Anderson 1991).

At this time researchers were becoming interested in writing fluency as a pivotal part of the writing process (Gray 1980). Students in the classroom were more actively involved in the writing process and as a result, writing fluency increased with activities like journal writing. Teachers used writing prompts to

direct student thinking and to provide the background and purpose for the writing assignment (California Writing Project 1987). The prompts were useful in developing more writing fluency but by themselves were not powerful enough to elicit higher level thinking (Applebee 1987). Therefore, the students were unable to evaluate and synthesize information. The students were able to write more freely but their fluency was further inhibited by the many stages and rewriting required before the final draft. Teachers also noted that the writing process activities were not appropriate for all writing tasks (Applebee 1986). The Process Approach proved to be ineffective as students did not learn to link the process activities into their own writing (Applebee & Langer 1987). Teachers and researchers were in agreement that the Process Approach was superior to the Product Approach to writing but was still ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Applebee 1986).

Overview of the Whole Language Approach

Currently the Whole Language Approach incorporates the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in an integrated natural environment. Whole Language is a philosophy of learning and teaching based on the following fundamental assumptions: learning is social; learners are actively involved; students should make choices; students share decision making in a risk free environment; and it includes the whole curriculum of

language arts, math, art, music, and science (Butler 1987). The Whole Language approach integrated language arts and children saw their learning as whole, rather than fragmented subjects (Wagner 1985). Whole Language also added the use of literature to the curriculum and this change promoted a reform in education (Heller 1991).

In the Whole Language approach the teacher serves as the model for the writing process. Teachers model instruction by writing in front of the class and by demonstrating brainstorming and editing strategies (Wagner 1985). Teachers also explain why and what they are doing in an effort to help students understand the whole writing process. Contributions are made by both teachers and students to enhance the learning process (Canbourne 1987). Students make choices about their own topics for writing and share in the decision making process concerning what piece of writing they want to edit and publish (Newman, Church 1990). Students are given a chance to freely express themselves in writing from the first day of school. Daily journal writing, records of science observation and reading journals are activities which are designed specifically for writing (Teal 1987). Students discover that writing has real meaning for themselves and for others. Teachers encourage students to practice new skills and accept approximations as a sign of growth, rather than a mistake (Calkins 1983). In this type of risk-free environment writing

fluency is promoted and enhanced in the classroom.

In a study conducted by Knudson (1994) students were divided into groups and asked to write to a writing prompt, a picture, and about anything they wanted; the results of the study indicated that students improved with practice on all writing experiences, but they did not improve significantly thereafter. The condition for improvement lies in the structure of the instruction necessary to facilitate learning. Students tended to "peak out" and did not transfer their increased fluency gained through practice to a new experience. In conclusion, repetition of the same writing task did not continue to produce writing competence, nor did it facilitate transfer of writing fluency to other tasks (Knudson 1994).

The Whole Language Approach teaches students the model of how authors write and the importance of thinking and writing for themselves as well as others (Walshe 1987). Teachers use writing prompts to help students activate their prior knowledge and to focus on explicit information in their written responses (Pritchard 1993). The California Writing Project (1987), which was modeled after the Bay Area Writing Project, advocates the use of many types of prompts to improve student writing. The Bay Area Writing Project is based on extensive research to improve the quality of thought and the fluent use of language in writers (Goldberg 1983). The goal of the Bay Area Writing Project

instruction is the development of fluency, form, and correctness (Cotton 1988). Writing prompts utilized by the Bay Area Writing Project engaged students in problem-solving and higher order thinking skills. Prompts produced interesting and more proficient student writing (California Writing Project 1987). Writing prompts provide specific direction for the writing task. When children use "free-writing", we discover what's on their minds but when teachers use structured writing prompts, we find how our students think and analyze information (California Writing Project 1987). Teachers who use well constructed writing prompts find the overall quality and general level of writing improves (U.C.I. Writing Project 1987). Well-constructed prompts engage students in using all four levels of higher order thinking; recalling information, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing (Chan 1987). Writing prompts have proven to be useful to teachers and students during the past twenty-five years. The California Writing Project (1987) suggests that teachers field test writing prompts with their students in order to improve or refine writing prompts in the classroom.

# CHAPTER IV

## RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The following chapter describes the student sample participating in the research and the research design for the study.

### School Demographics

The school where the research was conducted is a traditionally designed facility consisting of twelve buildings which include twenty-five classrooms, a library, teachers' lounge/workroom, three offices, faculty dining room, kitchen, and cafeteria/auditorium/multi-purpose room. Certificated staff have an average of twenty years experience in the field of education. Eight teachers have earned master's degrees. Our psychologist has a doctorate. Staffing consists of twenty (20) regular classroom teachers, three (3) special day teachers, one resource specialist, one office manager, two custodians, and one principal. The school also employs the following support personnel: speech and language specialist, nurse, psychologist, a cafeteria manager, four special education aides, one noon supervisor, one instructional aid, three teacher aides, and one media clerk.

The K-6 school is located in Newport Beach, California, in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District. This school presently serves 602 students. It has a diverse student population from the

cities of Costa Mesa and Newport Beach. The socioeconomic spectrum is broad, ranging from very low to very high. Five hundred sixty-two (562) fill twenty (20) classes, and forty (40) students are special day placement, filling three (3) special education classes. Eighteen (18) of our students qualify for the ELD, or English Language Development program (formerly ESL-English as a Second Language). The vast majority of these students are classified LEP (Limited English Proficient), with only four (4) classified NEP (Non-English Proficient). Included in our ELD classes are eleven Hispanics, two Dutch speakers, one Arabic, one Korean, one Indian, and one Chinese.

Classroom Context

In September the sample population was comprised of sixty-seven students. Two were regular education classes, first and second grade. One was a fifth/sixth Special Day Class. Over the course of the study, there was a decrease of five students from the sample population. The fluctuation in size was due to parent relocation and student transfers to other sites. Student data was analyzed for those who were present throughout the entire study.

The first grade subjects consisted of twenty-seven students. There were thirteen boys and fourteen girls. The ethnic background of the class consisted of twenty-four Anglos, one Hispanic, one Arabian, and one Indian student. Of these students, three were Limited English Proficient (LEP) whose primary

languages are Spanish, Farsi, and Indian. The second grade subjects consisted of twenty-four students. There were twelve boys and twelve girls. The ethnic background of the class consisted of twenty-two Anglos, one Korean, and one Hispanic. Of these students, two were LEP whose primary languages were Spanish and Korean. The fifth/sixth Special Day Class subjects consisted of eleven students. There were nine boys and two girls. All students have been identified as learning disabled. The ethnic background of the class consisted of eight Anglos and three Hispanics. Of these students, three were LEP whose primary language is Spanish.

Rational for Implementing Action Research

The term action research captures the notion of disciplined inquiry (thus, "research") in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of the organization and performance (thus, "actions") (Calhoun 1994). The origin of action research is usually attributed to Kurt Lewin and his students. Two articles printed in 1946 and 1947 define action research as a three-step spiral process of 1) planning which involves "reconnaissance or fact-finding", 2) taking actions, and 3) fact-finding about the results of the action (Lewin 1947). The collaborative-researcher approach was utilized where joint work engaged in by teachers define an area of interest and seek solutions. The primary audience for results using collaborative-research are the members

of the research team. Cory (1953) was one of the first to officially promote action research in the field of education. His thesis states that school practitioners would make better decisions and implement more effective practices if they conducted research as part of their decision making process and used the results of such research as a guide to selection or modification of their practice. Lewin and others who developed the action research concept emphasized collective rather than individualistic problem solving and study. Thus, action researchers study problems which grow out of the community, work within a group to determine actions to be taken, and evaluate the effect of these actions within the community setting (Calhoun 1994). "Action research is a fancy way of saying, "'Let's study what's happening at our school, decide of we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community; study the effects; and then begin again"' (Calhoun, pg. 1, 1994).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was the mean number of words written in the students' writing samples.

Independent Variables

There were two independent variables for this study, the type of writing prompt given and the type of direction utilized. The type of writing prompt fell into one of the following three

categories: books, pictures or silent video clip. The direction group variable fell into one of the following two categories: to describe or to predict.

Instrument

The case study approach in the field of comparative research is most often recommended when there is a lack of research, such is the case in the area of writing prompts (Graves 1975).

The effects of three types of writing prompts were investigated to determine their effects on the writing fluency of primary grade students. The three writing prompts used were iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book). Two types of the writing prompts, books and picture, have traditionally been used to prompt writing because they are a fundamental part of the curriculum and they are easily accessible. It was decided to include video as a writing prompt because of the fixative property of media which allow events, actions, or objects to be preserved for future use (Wasinski 1984). One can use media as an initiating stimulus to compensate for a lack of experience. For example, students who have been unable to travel out of their neighborhood to visit the ocean or take an airplane trip may internalize the visual media experienced. Spilerger and Lieberman (1981), used film (movies) as a way of counter balancing their students' perceived lack of ideas to begin writing. In many instances, students' self-perceived low competence is reinforced

by this remedial instruction. Special education and children needing remedial help benefit because they are more often the recipient than giver of information in the classroom (Englert 1987).

Data Collection

Data were collected over a five month time period. Prompts were thematic using animals. A different animal was used as the subject for each monthly writing section. The animals were: September/Bears; October/Owls; November/Monkey; December/Reindeer; and January/Whales. A reference list of the books, pictures, and videos used are located in Appendix I. Three different writing prompts (book, video, picture) were presented each month for the designated animal.

The students had two task objectives. Each student was directed to record (write) on their paper, with a pencil, both a description and prediction. When all the students had completed the descriptive writing task, the teacher instructed them to turn their papers over and begin the predictive writing task. The time limit for each task objective was open-ended.

Symbolic Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the book (symbolic) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students

were asked to describe (tell about) the book that had just been read to them. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen following the conclusion of the book.

Enactive Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the video (enactive) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students were asked to describe (tell about) the video that they had just viewed. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen following the conclusion of the video.

Iconic Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the picture (iconic) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students were asked to describe (tell about) the picture that they had just seen. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought the subject matter would do next in the picture.

In each class the teachers recorded individual student writing fluency for each of the three writing prompts. Writing fluency was determined by counting the total number of words written for both the descriptive task objective and the predictive task objective.

Statistical Analysis

A 3 (writing prompt: book, video, and picture) by 2 (instruction: description and prediction) factorial design was used. Writing prompts and type of direction served as the independent variables. The total number of words written (writing fluency) served as the dependent measure.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with planned comparisons was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the writing prompts on writing fluency. The planned comparison for instruction was description versus prediction. Writing fluency was tested for each writing prompt: book (symbolic), video (enactive), and picture (iconic).

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a statistical technique that permits one to overcome the ambiguity involved in assessing significant differences when more than one comparison is made. It allows one to answer the following question: Is there an overall indication that the experimental treatments (i.e., independent variables) are producing differences among the means of the various groups? It has its greatest usefulness when two or more

independent variables are studied (Runyon, Haber 1984).

The following statistical formulas are used to calculate the F-ratio: $SS_{tot} = \sum x_{tot}^2 - \frac{(\sum x_{tot})^2}{N}$ $s^2 = \frac{SS_{bet}}{df_{bet}}$ $F = \frac{s^2_{bet}}{s^2_{wit}}$

$SS_{wit} = \sum \frac{(\sum w)^2}{N_i} - \frac{(\sum x_{tot})^2}{N}$ $df_{wit} = N - k$

$SS_{bet} = SS_{tot} - SS_{wit}$ $s^2_{wit} = \frac{SS_{wit}}{df_{wit}}$

$df_{bet} = k - 1$

The data generated by this research is presented in both narrative and figure format in Chapter V.

# CHAPTER V

## RESULTS

The results of this research are based on the dependent measure of the collected data. The findings will be presented in narrative, table and figure format.

Analysis of variance with planned comparisons was used to evaluate the written production of students using literature books, pictures and silent video clips as writing prompts. The planned comparison for the direction group variable was describe versus predict. Writing prompt effects were tested within each level of direction.

Table One presents the mean number of words written. The results of the planned comparisons are presented in the lower panel of Table One. Inspection of the relevant marginal means in the upper panel of Table One indicates that more words were written when subjects were asked to describe (M = 20.749) a writing prompt, than when they were asked to make a prediction (M = 11.175) based on the prompt.

Differences in the number of words written were observed among the three writing prompts. The analysis revealed a significant difference between the literature book prompt (M = 19.721) and video clip prompt (M = 14.090), with the literature book prompt eliciting a greater number of words written. Furthermore, it was found that the literature book prompt (M =

19.721), resulted in significantly more words written than the picture prompt (M = 14.074). No significant difference in the mean number of words written was found between the video clip prompt and the picture prompt.

Table One

Mean Number of Words Written as a Function of Direction and Writing Prompt.

| | Writing Prompt | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direction | Book | Video | Picture | Mean |
| Describe | 27.623 | 17.525 | 17.098 | 20.749 |
| Predict | 11.820 | 10.656 | 11.049 | 11.175 |
| Mean | 19.721 | 14.090 | 14.074 | |

Outcome for the Planned Comparisons

| | | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prompt Effects | | | |
| Book vs. Video | 1,242 | 3.065 | < 0.01 |
| at Describe | 1,120 | 3.466 | < 0.01 |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .714 | N/S |
| Book vs. Picture | 1,242 | 3.077 | < 0.01 |
| at Describe | 1,120 | 3.639 | < 0.01 |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .458 | N/S |
| Video vs. Picture | 1,242 | .011 | N/S |
| at Describe | 1,120 | .187 | N/S |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .244 | N/S |
| Direction Effects | | | |
| Describe vs. Predict | 1,364 | 7.163 | < 0.01 |
| at Book | 1,120 | 5.859 | < 0.01 |
| at Video | 1,120 | 3.494 | < 0.01 |
| at Picture | 1,120 | 3.055 | < 0.01 |

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted in an effort to increase student writing fluency. Action Research was implemented to examine the effects of instruction utilizing three different writing prompts. Literature books, silent video clips, and pictures were presented to students in an effort to elicit increases in the students' written expression.

Researchers and educators both agree that American school children lack fluency in their writing samples (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 1990). Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggests that students need more varied experiences in their writing practice and tasks (National Assessment of Educational Progress 1987). Thus, it was apparent that new approaches toward increasing student writing fluency needed to be explored.

Writing practices prior to the 1980's emphasized the finished written product as the goal of instruction in the classroom. This product approach to writing placed great emphasis on the mechanics and form of writing. However, students did not learn to use their own ideas in a meaningful context for writing (Parson 1985; Millocks 1984).

The Process Approach of the 1980's involved students in each of the stages of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing,

and publication (Hillocks 1984). Students were more involved in the writing experience but overall the Process Approach was found to be ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Applebee, Langer 1987).

Currently, the Whole Language movement allows students to write about topics meaningful to them. As a result, students write more freely to express their thoughts and ideas. Teachers are also more accepting of student approximations and view them as a sign of growth (Raphael 1994).

The intent of the present research study was to investigate strategies to improve student writing. Specifically, the researchers set out to increase their students' writing fluency and answer the following research question: Does student writing fluency vary as a function of writing prompts and direction?

The researchers chose to use Action Research to implement this study. Therefore, the researchers studied their own student populations in the process of gathering data. Data collection began in September 1994 and continued over a five month time period. Students were presented with three different writing prompts: Literature books (symbolic); silent video clips (enactive); and pictures (iconic) and given two different oral directions. The writing samples were collected and the number of words written were tabulated and recorded as a measure of fluency. At the conclusion of this five month study, the data indicated

that student writing fluency does vary as a function of writing prompt and oral directional strategy.

Conclusions

The results of Table One and Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 addressed the research question and the hypothesis of this research project. Student writing fluency was measured by tabulating the total number of words written for each passage. The researchers hypothesized that students would demonstrate a measurable difference in writing fluency through the use of three different writing prompts and two writing directions.

Table One indicates that of the three writing prompts presented, the literature book prompt produced the greatest number of words written (M = 19.721). Furthermore, the mean number of words written from the silent video clip (M = 14.090) and picture prompt (M = 14.074) were not significantly different from each other. The effects of the three writing prompts on written fluency is demonstrated in Figure One.

Table One also displays that there is a significant difference in the number of words written due to the type of direction given. The direction "describe" produced significantly more words written (M = 20.749) than did the direction "predict" (M = 11.175). This effect is demonstrated in Figure Two. Furthermore, this difference is shown to be significant with each of the three writing prompts. The literature book prompt produced

an average of 27.623 words written with the describe direction and only 11.820 words written with the predict direction as demonstrated in Figure Three. In addition, when utilising the silent video clip as a writing prompt, the describe direction produced a mean of 17.525 words written, while the predict direction resulted in a mean of 10.656, as demonstrated in Figure Four. Finally, when the picture prompt was implemented, writing fluency varied with an average of 17.098 words written using a describe direction and 11.049 words written using a predict direction, as demonstrated in Figure Five.

Thus, it appears from the data extracted that there is variability in writing fluency when different writing prompts are presented to students. Literature books appear to have the most significant impact on writing fluency. Furthermore, writing fluency is also affected by the directions given by the teacher. A "describe" direction resulted in a higher mean number of words written than did a "predict" direction. Thus, the findings of this research project indicate that the null hypothesis should be rejected.

Delimitations/Limitations

1. This study was limited to three elementary school classrooms at one elementary school in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District.

2. Student absenteeism was a problem. To be included in the sample population, it was necessary for each student to receive all of the given prompts throughout the duration of the study.

3. The extra time commitment for the classroom teacher was demanding due to preparation time (i.e., setting up the video clip, locating pictures that were age appropriate, working around the daily classroom schedule, etc.).

Programmatic Recommendations

Upon completion of the study, several recommendations concerning student fluency became evident. Students appeared to impose a time limit on themselves when asked to respond to the writing prompts. Thus, it is important to ensure that students do not feel "rushed" in their writing due to classroom work or activity scheduling. Fine motor skills may also affect student writing fluency. The developmental coordination of each student is different. As a result, the physical act of writing may impede the production of expressed written ideas.

Recommendations for Further Study

The results of this study have important implications for future research. The data presented not only provide evidence for increasing writing fluency through the use of writing prompts, but also suggest that the directions given by the teacher play a crucial role in written expression as well. Thus, further

research needs to explore both writing prompts and teacher directions in more detail. Future researchers may also want to focus their attention on the literature book as a writing prompt specifically, since it was revealed that its use provided the most fluency in student writing. The impact of many variables associated with the literature book prompt remain unknown. For instance, future researchers may want to compare student writing fluency using literature books which contain illustrations with those that do not. Likewise, the literature book format could be studied. Future research may address the relationship between a story depicted in a book format versus a video representation of the same story.

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# Appendix I

## Prompts

September 1994 - Bear

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - The Grizzlies, National Geographic Society, 1987, Stanford, CT.

Book (symbolic) - Caldone, Paul. The Three Bears, Clarionboors, N.Y., 1972.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.a.

October 1994 - Owl

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - The Night Hunters, Public Television Service, Siemens, 1986.

Book (symbolic) - Yolen, Jane. Owl Moon, Putname Publishing Co., New York, 1987.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.b.

November 1994 - Monkey

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - Jane Goodall, My Life with the Chimpanzees, National Geographic Society, Stamford, CT.

Book (symbolic) - Rey, H.A., Curious George Rides A Bike, Scholastic Books, N.Y., 1952

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.c.

December 1994 - Reindeer

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the

video/picture/book.
Video (enactive) - Prancer, Nelson Entertainment, Beverly Hill, CA, 1989.

Book (symbolic) - Brett, Jan, The Wild Christmas Reindeer, Scholastic, N.Y., 1990.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.d.

January 1995 - Whales

- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - Virtual Nature, Miranac Images, Inc., Seattle, Washington, 1993.

Book (symbolic) - Himmelman, John, A True Whale Story, Scholastic, N.Y., 1990.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.e.

APPENDIX III.4





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APPENDIX III-5



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APPENDIX 11.6

DOCUMENT RESUME

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ABSTRACT

An action research project set out to increase students' writing fluency and investigate whether writing fluency varies as a function of writing prompts and directions given to students. Subjects were 62 students in a first-grade class, a second-grade class, and a fifth/sixth-grade Special Day class (all in this class are learning disabled) in a school in Newport Beach, California. To motivate students, three types of writing prompts, iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book), were used to elicit increased writing fluency. Subjects were first asked to describe the prompts and then were asked to predict what would happen next. Writing samples were collected once a month for 5 months. Students' writing fluency was tabulated by counting the total number of words written after the presentation of each writing prompt. Results indicated that (1) the literature book prompt produced the greatest number of words written, and the mean number of words written for the other two prompts were not statistically significantly different; and (2) the direction to describe the prompt produced more words written than the direction to predict. Further research needs to explore both writing prompts and teacher directions in more detail. (Contains 64 references and 1 table of data. The writing prompts and several photographs are attached.) (RS)

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ED 398 591

# THE EFFECTS OF STIMULUS WRITING MODALITY TO PRODUCE WRITING FLUENCY IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

A Project Submitted in Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Arts

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COLLEGE

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STYLE GUIDE USED: MLA STYLE GUIDE

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The Newport-Mesa School Renewal Cadre, lead by Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun, prompted an investigation of writing strategies used in the classroom. Teachers often struggle with the problem of how to get children to write more (Clay 1985). The objective of this study was to determine which type of writing prompt and direction will elicit the most fluency in our students' writing. To meet this objective a research plan was developed to examine the effects of different writing prompts and instruction. This study will help further current professional research in the use of prompts to increase writing fluency.

Action Research was chosen as a means of collecting data, diagnosing a problem, and searching for a solution. This type of research is, "A fancy way of saying let's study what's happening at our school and decide how to make it a better place." (Calhoun pg. 1, 1993). Having identified the problem as the lack of student writing fluency, data was accumulated and studied within the bounds of action research. To motivate students, three types of writing prompts; iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book), were utilized to elicit increased written fluency. Over a five month period the effects of three types of writing prompts were measured. Writing samples were collected

once a month from September through January. The students' writing fluency was tabulated by counting the total number of words written after the presentation of each writing prompt.

The students were presented with three types of writing prompts: a literature book, a video clip, and a picture. After each prompt was presented, the students were asked to complete two tasks. The students were first asked to describe (tell about) the prompts. Then, they were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen next. Increases in student writing fluency were tabulated by counting the number of words written and statistically measured using analysis of variance to determine which writing prompt produced the greatest written fluency being defined as a measure of quantity not quality.

# CHAPTER II

# THE PROBLEM

## Significance of the Study

Writing is an essential part of a successful school curriculum. However, it appears that American school children are not learning the skills necessary to become proficient writers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1987) states that students are performing below national expectations in skills which involve the thinking and organization of written thoughts. In response to the general writing prompt activities 26% of the fourth grade and 19% of the eighth grade students were unable to focus and write on a single topic. The fourth grade prompt asked students to "write a scary story about this room" (Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann & Kennedy, pg. 24, 1995). The eighth grade prompts asked students to "describe yourself and your future." Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann and Kennedy's 1995 report concluded that the prompts did not make explicit expectations or establish a purpose for the students' writing (Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann & Kennedy 1995). Therefore, it appears that American children need instruction involving more writing practice and tasks that require in-depth thinking skills. Writing fluency in the primary grades (first through third) should serve as a building block for the thinking and writing necessary in the upper grades (fourth through sixth). The lack of a writing fluency foundation has impeded

higher levels of writing competency in the upper grades (N.A.E.P. Report 1994). The National Assessment of Educational Progress study suggests that students need more broad based experiences in which writing tasks are integrated with their work throughout the curriculum.

In the past, few research studies have investigated strategies which prompt students to write fluently. The product approach to writing of the 1970's equipped students with a writing strategy which placed great emphasis on the mechanics and form of writing. As a result, students did not learn how to use their own ideas in a meaningful context for writing (Parson 1985; Killocks 1984). Students were taught form and correctness with skills being separated into sub skills (Gray 1982). The product approach to writing concentrated on the final product as students were instructed to complete a "one-shot" written piece (Parsons 1985). The writing prompts were used to evaluate or test knowledge studied. Prompts were not intended to elicit a meaningful expression of ideas but to assess student writing and evaluate the students' knowledge (R. D. Walshe 1987). Students did not write fluently under this approach because meaningful ideas were deemphasized in favor of grammar and mechanics. Furthermore, students did not take risks in writing as they were afraid to make a mistake (Cotton 1988).

Writing instruction shifted from a product approach to a

process approach in the late 1970's. Students were involved in several stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publication (Parson 1985; Hillocks 1984). During this time students participated more in the writing experience with a greater emphasis being placed on the writer. Teachers used prompts to help their students generate ideas and to provide a background and purpose for writing (Applebee 1986). Students wrote more freely with the process approach but their fluency was inhibited by the many stages of writing and rewriting. Furthermore, this approach did not provide prompts which were powerful enough to elicit higher level thinking (Applebee 1986). After evaluating its effectiveness, the process approach to writing instruction has been found to be ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Langer, Applebee 1987).

Presently, the arrival of the whole language movement has encouraged students to write about meaningful and personally relevant topics (Raphael 1994). In this approach, writing has meaning for the author and the audience following the process of professional writers. Teachers instruct students to practice new skills and accept their approximations as a sign of growth rather than a mistake (Clay 1982). Many types of prompts are used to activate prior student knowledge and motivate meaningful written responses (Pritchard 1993). Field trips, video tapes, science experiments, art lessons, and literature are examples of prompts

which may be incorporated into the classroom curriculum to encourage writing fluency. The whole language approach allows students to write freely to express their thoughts and ideas. Teachers provide prompts which encourage students to organize their thoughts and evaluate information. Prompts give teachers ways to strengthen their writing program (Chan 1995). Unfortunately, the whole language approach does not utilize specific prompts to increase written fluency because the quality of prompts elicits very different responses among students (Chan 1995).

In reviewing the past approaches to writing instruction, it is evident that there is a need to develop different oral directional strategies that will increase the students' ability to write with greater fluency. The effects of instruction utilizing different writing prompts were analyzed in an Action Research framework. Three types of writing prompts, literature books, silent video clips, and pictures, were presented in an effort to elicit more fluency in student writing.

Research Question

Does student writing fluency vary as a function of writing prompt and direction?

Research Hypotheses

Students will demonstrate a measurable difference in writing fluency through the use of three different writing prompts and two

writing directions.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no measurable difference in fluency in student writing using three different writing prompts and two writing directions.

Definition of Terms

1. Action Research is defined as the process of collecting data about an ongoing system with the purpose of improving practice (Calhoun 1993).

2. Writing Prompt is defined as a motivational tool such as, a topic, situation, stimulus, or assignment used to elicit a response in expository writing.

3. Fluency is defined as the quantity of words in an expository writing selection.

Summary

The inability of researchers and teachers to identify effective writing prompts to elicit greater writing fluency in primary students inspired this research study. The writing process within the classroom setting was explored to discern which type of writing prompt and direction would have the greatest impact on fluency.

Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Furthering the growth of student writing is crucial to the development of communication skills which are used in all areas of the curriculum placing this ability at the forefront of educational concern, research and debate. Prompts have been used in writing instruction during the past twenty-five years to activate student knowledge and focus student thinking. It is important for teachers through the use of field testing to improve and refine the writing prompts used in their classrooms (The California Writing Project 1987). This literature review on the subject of improving writing fluency in the primary grades includes a review of the following instructional strategies: The Product Approach; The Process Approach; and the Whole Language Approach.

Overview of The Product Approach

The traditional Product Approach taught form and correctness in writing (Parson, Hillocks 1984). A perfect copy was expected so children learned that it was wrong to make mistakes. Fluency can not come without mistakes, and perfection has no room for mistakes (Clay 1982).

In the Product Approach teachers provided drill work on specific skills. Teachers also controlled many of the writing decisions for the students in terms of topic, form and length

(Parson 1985). Learning involved adhering to writing rules and mastery of formal conventions and models (Gray 1960, Young 1983). Using the Product Approach, students' writing fluency was impeded as the objective was to 'get it right' the first time because this was the only version turned in. Too much emphasis was placed on the form and mechanics of writing and as a result, students did not learn to use their ideas in a meaningful written context (Parsons 1985).

In the Product Approach, writing prompts were used as a tool to evaluate student writing skills in terms of grammar and punctuation. A writing prompt was used to elicit the mechanics of writing and was not intended to extract a meaningful expression of ideas. Hillocks (1987) and Parsons (1985) revealed that the Product Approach to writing is ineffective because too much emphasis was placed on the mechanics of writing. Students did not learn how to link the perfect model with fluency in applying their ideas to writing. In conclusion, Hillocks (1987) research demonstrates that the knowledge of grammatical rules alone do not improve one's writing. The sum of the parts does not necessarily equal the whole product in writing.

Overview of the Process Approach

As students in the primary grades begin to develop control over their written language the goal of instruction is the development of fluency in writing (California Writing Project

1987). In the 1970's and 1980's a major change in the approach to writing took place. Instead of the attention being focused on the final written product, there was a renewed interest in the process approach to the teaching of writing (Applebee 1987). The Process Approach emphasized an author's writing stages as opposed to focusing on the final product in terms of grammar and spelling.

Instructional strategies were designed to help the students organize ideas before writing and revise their initial drafts. The activities associated with the Process Approach include prewriting, sharing/responding, revising, editing, and publication (Graves 1983, Hillocks 1987, Applebee 1987, Langer 1987). Researchers tried to follow the stages of writing authors use and translate their actions into instructional methods for the classroom. Furthermore, the researchers also began to shift their theoretical views of writing to go beyond skills. Thus, the Process Approach helped students construct the thinking process and give meaning to their written discourse with the writer's purpose being the communication of ideas (Englert, Raphael & Anderson 1991).

At this time researchers were becoming interested in writing fluency as a pivotal part of the writing process (Gray 1960). Students in the classroom were more actively involved in the writing process and as a result, writing fluency increased with activities like journal writing. Teachers used writing prompts to

direct student thinking and to provide the background and purpose for the writing assignment (California Writing Project 1987). The prompts were useful in developing more writing fluency but by themselves were not powerful enough to elicit higher level thinking (Applebee 1987). Therefore, the students were unable to evaluate and synthesize information. The students were able to write more freely but their fluency was further inhibited by the many stages and rewriting required before the final draft. Teachers also noted that the writing process activities were not appropriate for all writing tasks (Applebee 1986). The Process Approach proved to be ineffective as students did not learn to link the process activities into their own writing (Applebee & Langer 1987). Teachers and researchers were in agreement that the Process Approach was superior to the Product Approach to writing but was still ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Applebee 1986).

Overview of the Whole Language Approach

Currently the Whole Language Approach incorporates the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in an integrated natural environment. Whole Language is a philosophy of learning and teaching based on the following fundamental assumptions: learning is social; learners are actively involved; students should make choices; students share decision making in a risk free environment; and it includes the whole curriculum of

language arts, math, art, music, and science (Butler 1987). The Whole Language approach integrated language arts and children saw their learning as whole, rather than fragmented subjects (Wagner 1985). Whole Language also added the use of literature to the curriculum and this change promoted a reform in edocation (Heller 1990).

In the Whole Language approach the teacher serves as the model for the writing process. Teachers model instruction by writing in front of the class and by demonstrating brainstorming and editing strategies (Wagner 1985). Teachers also explain why and what they are doing in an effort to help students understand the whole writing process. Contributions are made by both teachers and students to enhance the learning process (Cambourne 1987). Students make choices about their own topics for writing and share in the decision making process concerning what piece of writing they want to edit and publish (Newman, Church 1990). Students are given a chance to freely express themselves in writing from the first day of school. Daily journal writing, records of science observation and reading journals are activities which are designed specifically for writing (Teal 1987). Students discover that writing has real meaning for themselves and for others. Teachers encourage students to practice new skills and accept approximations as a sign of growth, rather than a mistake (Calkins 1983). In this type of risk-free environment writing

fluency is promoted and enhanced in the classroom.

In a study conducted by Knudson (1994) students were divided into groups and asked to write to a writing prompt, a picture, and about anything they wanted; the results of the study indicated that students improved with practice on all writing experiences, but they did not improve significantly thereafter. The condition for improvement lies in the structure of the instruction necessary to facilitate learning. Students tended to "peak out" and did not transfer their increased fluency gained through practice to a new experience. In conclusion, repetition of the same writing task did not continue to produce writing competence, nor did it facilitate transfer of writing fluency to other tasks (Knudson 1994).

The Whole Language Approach teaches students the model of how authors write and the importance of thinking and writing for themselves as well as others (Malshe 1987). Teachers use writing prompts to help students activate their prior knowledge and to focus on explicit information in their written responses (Pritchard 1993). The California Writing Project (1987), which was modeled after the Bay Area Writing Project, advocates the use of many types of prompts to improve student writing. The Bay Area Writing Project is based on extensive research to improve the quality of thought and the fluent use of language in writers (Goldberg 1983). The goal of the Bay Area Writing Project

instruction is the development of fluency, form, and correctness (Cotton 1988). Writing prompts utilized by the Bay Area Writing Project engaged students in problem-solving and higher order thinking skills. Prompts produced interesting and more proficient student writing (California Writing Project 1987). Writing prompts provide specific direction for the writing task. When children use "free-writing", we discover what's on their minds but when teachers use structured writing prompts, we find how our students think and analyze information (California Writing Project 1987). Teachers who use well constructed writing prompts find the overall quality and general level of writing improves (U.C.I. Writing Project 1987). Well-constructed prompts engage students in using all four levels of higher order thinking; recalling information, analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing (Chan 1987). Writing prompts have proven to be useful to teachers and students during the past twenty-five years. The California Writing Project (1987) suggests that teachers field test writing prompts with their students in order to improve or refine writing prompts in the classroom.

# CHAPTER IV

## RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The following chapter describes the student sample participating in the research and the research design for the study.

### School Demographics

The school where the research was conducted is a traditionally designed facility consisting of twelve buildings which include twenty-five classrooms, a library, teachers' lounge/workroom, three offices, faculty dining room, kitchen, and cafeteria/auditorium/multi-purpose room. Certificated staff have an average of twenty years experience in the field of education. Eight teachers have earned master's degrees. Our psychologist has a doctorate. Staffing consists of twenty (20) regular classroom teachers, three (3) special day teachers, one resource specialist, one office manager, two custodians, and one principal. The school also employs the following support personnel: speech and language specialist, nurse, psychologist, a cafeteria manager, four special education aides, one noon supervisor, one instructional aid, three teacher aides, and one media clerk.

The K-6 school is located in Newport Beach, California, in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District. This school presently serves 602 students. It has a diverse student population from the

cities of Costa Mesa and Newport Beach. The socioeconomic spectrum is broad, ranging from very low to very high. Five hundred sixty-two (562) fill twenty (20) classes, and forty (40) students are special day placement, filling three (3) special education classes. Eighteen (18) of our students qualify for the ELD, or English Language Development program (formerly ESL-English as a Second Language). The vast majority of these students are classified LEP (Limited English Proficient), with only four (4) classified NEP (Non-English Proficient). Included in our ELD classes are eleven Hispanics, two Dutch speakers, one Arabic, one Korean, one Indian, and one Chinese.

Classroom Context

In September the sample population was comprised of sixty-seven students. Two were regular education classes, first and second grade. One was a fifth/sixth Special Day Class. Over the course of the study, there was a decrease of five students from the sample population. The fluctuation in size was due to parent relocation and student transfers to other sites. Student data was analyzed for those who were present throughout the entire study.

The first grade subjects consisted of twenty-seven students. There were thirteen boys and fourteen girls. The ethnic background of the class consisted of twenty-four Anglos, one Hispanic, one Arabian, and one Indian student. Of these students, three were Limited English Proficient (LEP) whose primary

languages are Spanish, Farsi, and Indian. The second grade subjects consisted of twenty-four students. There were twelve boys and twelve girls. The ethnic background of the class consisted of twenty-two Anglos, one Korean, and one Hispanic. Of these students, two were LEP whose primary languages were Spanish and Korean. The fifth/sixth Special Day Class subjects consisted of eleven students. There were nine boys and two girls. All students have been identified as learning disabled. The ethnic background of the class consisted of eight Anglos and three Hispanics. Of these students, three were LEP whose primary language is Spanish.

Rational for Implementing Action Research

The term action research captures the notion of disciplined inquiry (thus, "research") in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of the organization and performance (thus, "actions") (Calhoun 1994). The origin of action research is usually attributed to Kurt Lewin and his students. Two articles printed in 1946 and 1947 define action research as a three-step spiral process of 1) planning which involves "reconnaissance or fact-finding", 2) taking actions, and 3) fact-finding about the results of the action (Lewin 1947). The collaborative-researcher approach was utilized where joint work engaged in by teachers define an area of interest and seek solutions. The primary audience for results using collaborative-research are the members

of the research team. Cory (1953) was one of the first to officially promote action research in the field of education. His thesis states that school practitioners would make better decisions and implement more effective practices if they conducted research as part of their decision making process and used the results of such research as a guide to selection or modification of their practice. Lewin and others who developed the action research concept emphasized collective rather than individualistic problem solving and study. Thus, action researchers study problems which grow out of the community, work within a group to determine actions to be taken, and evaluate the effect of these actions within the community setting (Calhoun 1994). "Action research is a fancy way of saying, '"Let's study what's happening at our school, decide of we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach and how we relate to students and the community; study the effects; and then begin again"' (Calhoun, pg. 1, 1994).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was the mean number of words written in the students' writing samples.

Independent Variables

There were two independent variables for this study, the type of writing prompt given and the type of direction utilized. The type of writing prompt fell into one of the following three

categories: books, pictures or silent video clip. The direction group variable fell into one of the following two categories: to describe or to predict.

Instrument

The case study approach in the field of comparative research is most often recommended when there is a lack of research, such is the case in the area of writing prompts (Graves 1975).

The effects of three types of writing prompts were investigated to determine their effects on the writing fluency of primary grade students. The three writing prompts used were iconic (pictures), enactive (video), and symbolic (book). Two types of the writing prompts, books and picture, have traditionally been used to prompt writing because they are a fundamental part of the curriculum and they are easily accessible. It was decided to include video as a writing prompt because of the fixative property of media which allow events, actions, or objects to be preserved for future use (Wasinski 1984). One can use media as an initiating stimulus to compensate for a lack of experience. For example, students who have been unable to travel out of their neighborhood to visit the ocean or take an airplane trip may internalize the visual media experienced. Spilerger and Lieberman (1981), used film (movies) as a way of counter balancing their students' perceived lack of ideas to begin writing. In many instances, students' self-perceived low competence is reinforced

by this remedial instruction. Special education and children needing remedial help benefit because they are more often the recipient than giver of information in the classroom (Englert 1987).

Data Collection

Data were collected over a five month time period. Prompts were thematic using animals. A different animal was used as the subject for each monthly writing section. The animals were: September/Bears; October/Owls; November/Monkey; December/Reindeer; and January/Whales. A reference list of the books, pictures, and videos used are located in Appendix I. Three different writing prompts (book, video, picture) were presented each month for the designated animal.

The students had two task objectives. Each student was directed to record (write) on their paper, with a pencil, both a description and prediction. When all the students had completed the descriptive writing task, the teacher instructed them to turn their papers over and begin the predictive writing task. The time limit for each task objective was open-ended.

Symbolic Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the book (symbolic) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students

were asked to describe (tell about) the book that had just been read to them. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen following the conclusion of the book.

Enactive Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the video (enactive) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students were asked to describe (tell about) the video that they had just viewed. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought would happen following the conclusion of the video.

Iconic Writing Prompt Instructions

The writing prompt for the picture (iconic) was preceded by both a written and an oral direction. The written instruction was displayed on the chalkboard as the teacher orally discussed the task objective. Two instructions were given. First, the students were asked to describe (tell about) the picture that they had just seen. After this task had been completed, the second direction was given. Students were asked to predict (make an educated guess) what they thought the subject matter would do next in the picture.

In each class the teachers recorded individual student writing fluency for each of the three writing prompts. Writing fluency was determined by counting the total number of words written for both the descriptive task objective and the predictive task objective.

Statistical Analysis

A 3 (writing prompt: book, video, and picture) by 2 (instruction: description and prediction) factorial design was used. Writing prompts and type of direction served as the independent variables. The total number of words written (writing fluency) served as the dependent measure.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) with planned comparisons was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the writing prompts on writing fluency. The planned comparison for instruction was description versus prediction. Writing fluency was tested for each writing prompt: book (symbolic), video (enactive), and picture (iconic).

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a statistical technique that permits one to overcome the ambiguity involved in assessing significant differences when more than one comparison is made. It allows one to answer the following question: Is there an overall indication that the experimental treatments (i.e., independent variables) are producing differences among the means of the various groups? It has its greatest usefulness when two or more

independent variables are studied (Runyon, Haber 1964).

The following statistical formulas are used to calculate the F-ratio:

$$SS_{bg} = \sum x_{bg}^2 - \frac{(\sum x_{bg})^2}{N} \qquad df_{bg} = \frac{SS_{bg}}{df_{bg}} \qquad F = \frac{df_{bg}}{df_{wg}}$$

$$SS_{wg} = \sum \frac{(\sum x)^2}{N_i} - \frac{(\sum x_{wg})^2}{N} \qquad df_{wg} = N - a$$

$$SS_{wg} = SS_t - SS_{bg} \qquad df = \frac{SS_{wg}}{df_{wg}}$$

$$df_{bg} = a - 1$$

The data generated by this research is presented in both narrative and figure format in Chapter V.

# CHAPTER V

## RESULTS

The results of this research are based on the dependent measure of the collected data. The findings will be presented in narrative, table and figure format.

Analysis of variance with planned comparisons was used to evaluate the written production of students using literature books, pictures and silent video clips as writing prompts. The planned comparison for the direction group variable was describe versus predict. Writing prompt effects were tested within each level of direction.

Table One presents the mean number of words written. The results of the planned comparisons are presented in the lower panel of Table One. Inspection of the relevant marginal means in the upper panel of Table One indicates that more words were written when subjects were asked to describe (M = 20.749) a writing prompt, than when they were asked to make a prediction (M = 11.175) based on the prompt.

Differences in the number of words written were observed among the three writing prompts. The analysis revealed a significant difference between the literature book prompt (M = 19.721) and video clip prompt (M = 14.090), with the literature book prompt eliciting a greater number of words written. Furthermore, it was found that the literature book prompt (M =

19.721), resulted in significantly more words written than the picture prompt (M = 14.074). No significant difference in the mean number of words written was found between the video clip prompt and the picture prompt.

Table One

Mean Number of Words Written as a Function of

Direction and Writing Prompt.

| | Writing Prompt | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direction | Book | Video | Picture | Mean |
| Describe | 27.623 | 17.525 | 17.098 | 20.749 |
| Predict | 11.820 | 10.656 | 11.049 | 11.175 |
| Mean | 19.721 | 14.090 | 14.074 | |

Outcome for the Planned Comparisons

| Prompt Effects | | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|
| Book vs. Video | 1,242 | 3.065 | < 0.01 |
| at Describe | 1,120 | 3.466 | < 0.01 |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .714 | N/S |
| Book vs. Picture | 1,242 | 3.077 | < 0.01 |
| at Describe | 1,120 | 3.639 | < 0.01 |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .458 | N/S |
| Video vs. Picture | 1,242 | .011 | N/S |
| at Describe | 1,120 | .187 | N/S |
| at Predict | 1,120 | .244 | N/S |
| Direction Effects | | | |
| Describe vs. Predict | 1,364 | 7.163 | < 0.01 |
| at Book | 1,120 | 5.859 | < 0.01 |
| at Video | 1,120 | 3.494 | < 0.01 |
| at Picture | 1,120 | 3.055 | < 0.01 |

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted in an effort to increase student writing fluency. Action Research was implemented to examine the effects of instruction utilizing three different writing prompts. Literature books, silent video clips, and pictures were presented to students in an effort to elicit increases in the students' written expression.

Researchers and educators both agree that American school children lack fluency in their writing samples (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 1990). Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggests that students need more varied experiences in their writing practice and tasks (National Assessment of Educational Progress 1987). Thus, it was apparent that new approaches toward increasing student writing fluency needed to be explored.

Writing practices prior to the 1980's emphasized the finished written product as the goal of instruction in the classroom. This product approach to writing placed great emphasis on the mechanics and form of writing. However, students did not learn to use their own ideas in a meaningful context for writing (Parson 1985; Millocks 1984).

The Process Approach of the 1980's involved students in each of the stages of writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing,

and publication (Hillocks 1984). Students were more involved in the writing experience but overall the Process Approach was found to be ineffective in helping students to think and write more clearly (Applebee, Langer 1987).

Currently, the Whole Language movement allows students to write about topics meaningful to them. As a result, students write more freely to express their thoughts and ideas. Teachers are also more accepting of student approximations and view them as a sign of growth (Raphael 1994).

The intent of the present research study was to investigate strategies to improve student writing. Specifically, the researchers set out to increase their students' writing fluency and answer the following research question: Does student writing fluency vary as a function of writing prompts and direction?

The researchers chose to use Action Research to implement this study. Therefore, the researchers studied their own student populations in the process of gathering data. Data collection began in September 1994 and continued over a five month time period. Students were presented with three different writing prompts: Literature books (symbolic); silent video clips (enactive); and pictures (iconic) and given two different oral directions. The writing samples were collected and the number of words written were tabulated and recorded as a measure of fluency. At the conclusion of this five month study, the data indicated

that student writing fluency does vary as a function of writing prompt and oral directional strategy.

Conclusions

The results of Table One and Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 addressed the research question and the hypothesis of this research project. Student writing fluency was measured by tabulating the total number of words written for each passage. The researchers hypothesized that students would demonstrate a measurable difference in writing fluency through the use of three different writing prompts and two writing directions.

Table One indicates that of the three writing prompts presented, the literature book prompt produced the greatest number of words written (M = 19.721). Furthermore, the mean number of words written from the silent video clip (M = 14.090) and picture prompt (M = 14.074) were not significantly different from each other. The effects of the three writing prompts on written fluency is demonstrated in Figure One.

Table One also displays that there is a significant difference in the number of words written due to the type of direction given. The direction "describe" produced significantly more words written (M = 20.749) than did the direction "predict" (M = 11.175). This effect is demonstrated in Figure Two. Furthermore, this difference is shown to be significant with each of the three writing prompts. The literature book prompt produced

an average of 27.623 words written with the describe direction and only 11.920 words written with the predict direction as demonstrated in Figure Three. In addition, when utilizing the silent video clip as a writing prompt, the describe direction produced a mean of 17.525 words written, while the predict direction resulted in a mean of 10.656, as demonstrated in Figure Four. Finally, when the picture prompt was implemented, writing fluency varied with an average of 17.098 words written using a describe direction and 11.049 words written using a predict direction, as demonstrated in Figure Five.

Thus, it appears from the data extracted that there is variability in writing fluency when different writing prompts are presented to students. Literature books appear to have the most significant impact on writing fluency. Furthermore, writing fluency is also affected by the directions given by the teacher. A "describe" direction resulted in a higher mean number of words written than di a "predict" direction. Thus, the findings of this research project indicate that the null hypothesis should be rejected.

Delimitations/Limitations

1. This study was limited to three elementary school classrooms at one elementary school in the Newport-Mesa Unified School District.

2. Student absenteeism was a problem. To be included in the sample population, it was necessary for each student to receive all of the given prompts throughout the duration of the study.

3. The extra time commitment for the classroom teacher was demanding due to preparation time (i.e., setting up the video clip, locating pictures that were age appropriate, working around the daily classroom schedule, etc.).

Programmatic Recommendations

Upon completion of the study, several recommendations concerning student fluency became evident. Students appeared to impose a time limit on themselves when asked to respond to the writing prompts. Thus, it is important to ensure that students do not feel "rushed" in their writing due to classroom work or activity scheduling. Fine motor skills may also affect student writing fluency. The developmental coordination of each student is different. As a result, the physical act of writing may impede the production of expressed written ideas.

Recommendations for Further Study

The results of this study have important implications for future research. The data presented not only provide evidence for increasing writing fluency through the use of writing prompts, but also suggest that the directions given by the teacher play a crucial role in written expression as well. Thus, further

research needs to explore both writing prompts and teacher directions in more detail. Future researchers may also want to focus their attention on the literature book as a writing prompt specifically, since it was revealed that its use provided the most fluency in student writing. The impact of many variables associated with the literature book prompt remain unknown. For instance, future researchers may want to compare student writing fluency using literature books which contain illustrations with those that do not. Likewise, the literature book format could be studied. Future research may address the relationship between a story depicted in a book format versus a video representation of the same story.

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# Appendix I

## Prompts

September 1994 - Bear

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - The Grizzlies, National Geographic Society, 1987, Stanford, CT.

Book (symbolic) - Galdone, Paul. The Three Bears, Clarionboors, N.Y., 1972.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.a.

October 1994 - Owl

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - The Night Hunters, Public Television Service, Siemens, 1986.

Book (symbolic) - Yolen, Jane. Owl Moon, Putname Publishing Co., New York, 1987.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.b.

November 1994 - Monkey

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - Jane Goodall, My Life with the Chimpanzees, National Geographic Society, Stamford, CT.

Book (symbolic) - Rey, H.A., Curious George Rides A Bike, Scholastic Books, N.Y., 1952

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.c.

December 1994 - Reindeer

Written on the chalkboard:
- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the

video/picture/book.
Video (enactive) - Prancer, Nelson Entertainment, Beverly Hill, CA, 1989.

Book (symbolic) - Brett, Jan, The Mild Christmas Reindeer, Scholastic, N.Y., 1990.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.d.

January 1995 - Whales

- Describe (tell about) the video/picture/book.
- Predict (guess) what will happen next in the video/picture/book.

Video (enactive) - Virtual Nature, Miramac Images, Inc., Seattle, Washington, 1993.

Book (symbolic) - Himmelman, IBIS, A True Whale Story, Scholastic, N.Y., 1990.

Picture (iconic) - See Appendix II.e.

APPENDIX II.6



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APPENDIX III-B



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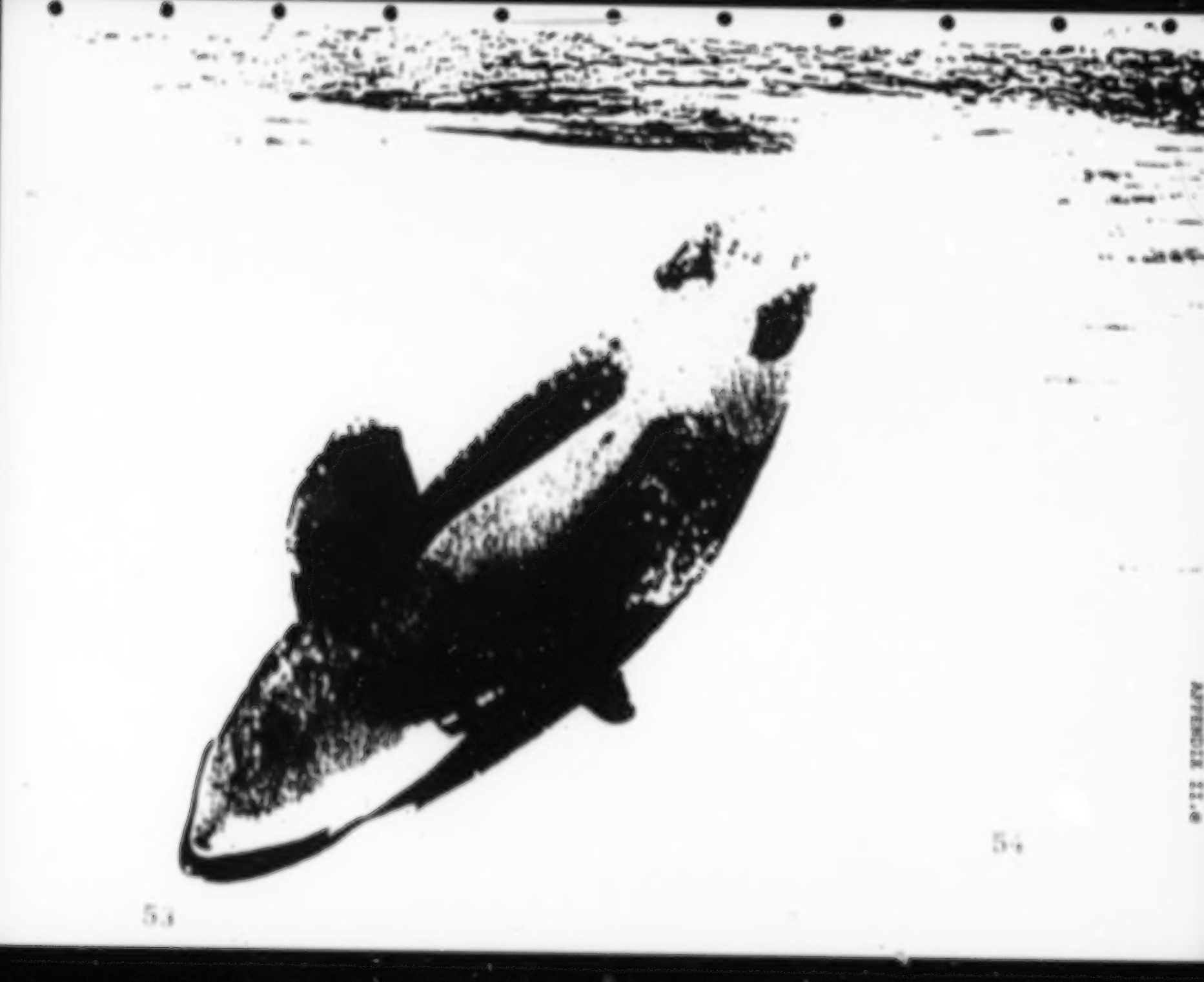



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